

Message Text

PAGE 01 STATE 080623
ORIGIN SS-05

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /006 R

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DRAFTED BY: S/S- O RPERITO

APPROVED BY: S/S- O RPERITO

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FM SECSTATE WASHDC

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C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 080623

FOR UNDER SECRETARY HABIB

FOL TEL SENT ACTION SECSTATE INFO DACCA KABUL KARACHI NEW
DELHI LAHORE CINCPAC FROM ISLAMABAD DTD 11 APR 77 QTE

C O N F I D E N T I A L ISLAMABAD 3488

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PK

SUBJECT: PRESSURES ON BHUTTO MOUNT

REF: LAHORE 335 (NOTAL), LAHORE 336 (NOTAL)

SUMMARY: EVENTS THIS PAST WEEKEND (REFTELS) WERE CRITICALLY
IMPORTANT SINCE THEY OCCURRED IN LAHORE. THE OPPOSITION
HAS REALIZED THAT IF ITS MOVEMENT HAD ANY CHANCE OF SUCCESS
IT MUST CARRY THE PUNJAB AND SPECIFICALLY LAHORE WHICH UNTIL
NOW HAS BEEN QUIETER THAN THE SIND. THE LEVEL AND INTENSITY
OF THE DEMONSTRATIONS IN LAHORE AND THE SUBSEQUENT KILLINGS
HAVE DISRUPTED BHUTTO'S POST-ELECTION STRATEGY OF GIVING
THE IMPRESSION OF RETURNING THE COUNTRY TO NORMALCY AND
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ATTEMPTING TO DIVIDE THE OPPOSITION. THERE WERE PRESSURES
WITHIN THE PAKISTAN NATIONAL ALLIANCE (PNA) TO SIT DOWN AND
NEGOTIATE WITH THE PM AND PRESSURES WITHIN THE PPP ON THE PM
TO MAKE FURTHER GESTURES TO THE OPPOSITION. HOWEVER IT HAS
NOW BECOME MORE DIFFICULT FOR THE PM TO MAKE ANY FURTHER
CONCESSIONS SINCE THEY WOULD BE SEEN AS SIGNS OF WEAKNESS.
ALSO, THOSE IN THE PNA OPPOSED TO NEGOTIATIONS HAVE HAD
THEIR HANDS STRENGTHENED SINCE THEY PROBABLY BELIEVE THE
EVENTS IN LAHORE REPRESENT A BREAKTHROUGH AND THE PM IS ON
THE RUN.

THE PROSPECT IS FOR A HIGHER LEVEL OF CONFRONTATION IN THE NEXT SEVERAL WEEKS. THE ARMY IS THE KEY ELEMENT TO WATCH. THE OTHER TWO IMPORTANT ELEMENTS ARE STUDENTS AND LABOR. BOTH OF THE LATTER PLAYED AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN AYUB'S DOWNFALL BUT HAVE SO FAR BEEN GENERALLY QUIESCENT IN THE ANTI-BHUTTO AGITATION. THE PM'S POSITION HAS OBVIOUSLY BEEN WEAKENED BY EVENTS DURING THE PAST TWO DAYS. WE EXPECT THE AGITATION WILL CONTINUE AND THE OPPOSITION WILL HAVE RENEWED VIGOR AND CONFIDENCE. IT IS TOO SOON TO SAY BHUTTO HAS BEGUN AN INEXORABLE SLIDE TO POLITICAL OBLIVION. HE STILL HAS CONSIDERABLE RESOURCES ON WHICH HE CAN DRAW. HOWEVER ALL THESE RESOURCES - SUCH AS THE CIVIL SERVICE AND THE ARMY - ARE MOST SUPPORTIVE WHEN HE DOES NOT HAVE TO CONTINUALLY CALL UPON THEM. NO ONE CAN PREDICT THE OUTCOME OF THE CONFRONTATION, BUT AFTER THIS WEEKEND'S EVENTS, FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE MARCH 7, TIME MAY BE RUNNING AGAINST THE PM. END SUMMARY.

1. THE EVENTS OF THIS PAST WEEKEND IN PUNJAB (SEE REFTELS) HAVE OBVIOUSLY DISRUPTED BHUTTO'S POST-ELECTION STRATEGY AND MAY HAVE OMINOUS IMPLICATIONS FOR THE PM'S STRUGGLE TO MAINTAIN HIMSELF IN POWER.

2. AS WE HAVE REPORTED EARLIER, BHUTTO'S STRATEGY HAS HAD SEVERAL KEY ELEMENTS. HE SOUGHT TO GIVE THE IMPRESSION OF MOVING AHEAD WITH THE COUNTRY'S POST-ELECTION BUSINESS REGARD-
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LESS OF WHETHER OR NOT THE OPPOSITION CHOSE TO PARTICIPATE. AT THE SAME TIME, HE MADE SERIOUS EFFORTS TO DIVIDE THE OPPOSITION. ALTHOUGH THE PAKISTAN NATIONAL ALLIANCE (PNA) HAD MANAGED TO MAINTAIN ITS UNITY, THERE WERE SIGNS THE ALLIANCE WAS BEGINNING TO FRAY. THERE WERE OBVIOUSLY DIFFERENT OPINIONS IN THE PNA ON WHETHER OR NOT TO HAVE DISCUSSION WITH BHUTTO IN THE ABSENCE OF HIS AGREEING TO HOLD NEW NATIONAL ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS.

3. THERE WERE ALSO PRESSURES ON THE PRIME MINISTER TO MAKE SOME FURTHER CONCILIATORY GESTURES TO CONVINCE THE PNA OF HIS GOOD INTENTIONS AND TO ENCOURAGE THEM TO NEGOTIATE. THE GRAND OLD MAN OF THE JAMAT-I-ISLAMI - MAULANA MAUDOODI - HAD FLOATED A PLAN WHEREBY BHUTTO WOULD LIFT THE EMERGENCY, ADMIT FRAUD IN THE ELECTIONS, RELEASE POLITICAL PRISONERS, LIFT SECTION 144 AND TAKE VARIOUS OTHER STEPS TO SHOW HIS GOOD WILL. MAUDOODI CLAIMED THAT IF BHUTTO AGREED, THE OPPOSITION WOULD THEN SIT DOWN AND TALK. THE PNA LATER OFFICIALLY STATED THAT MAUDOODI WAS NOT SPEAKING ON ITS BEHALF AND THAT THE MOVEMENT WOULD CONTINUE. THERE WERE UNDOUBTEDLY THOSE IN BHUTTO'S CAMP AS WELL WHO WERE ENCOURAGING HIM TO MAKE FURTHER GESTURES TO THE PNA.

4. FOLLOWING THE DEMONSTRATIONS AND SHOOTINGS IN

LAHORE, AND THE RESPONSE THEY ENGENDERED THROUGHOUT THE PUNJAB AND IN THE SIND, IT WILL NOW BE MORE DIFFICULT FOR THE PM TO MAKE ANY FURTHER CONCESSIONS TO THE OPPOSITION. ANY SUCH STEPS WOULD BE SEEN AS A SIGN OF WEAKNESS IN THE PAKISTANI POLITICAL THEATER, RATHER THAN AS A MAGNANIMOUS GESTURE. MANY WOULD ASSUME THAT BHUTTO WAS IN HASTY AND HEADLONG RETREAT IN THE FACE OF OPPOSITION INSPIRED AND SPONSORED POPULAR AGITATION. ALSO, THE EVENTS OF THE WEEKEND HAVE STRENGTHENED THE FORCES IN THE OPPOSITION WHO ARE OPPOSED TO AN ACCOMMODATION WITH BHUTTO. MANY OPPOSITIONISTS WILL ASSUME THAT NOW THAT THE PNA HAS DEMONSTRATED ITS ABILITY TO MOBILIZE COMMITTED FORCES INTO VIOLENT ACTIVITIES IN THE STREETS OF LAHORE, THERE IS NO CONFIDENTIAL

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NEED FOR COMPROMISE. THEY PROBABLY ALSO BELIEVE THE WEEKEND REPRESENTED A BREAK-THROUGH IN THEIR TACTICS, THAT BHUTTO IS ON THE RUN, AND THAT PUBLIC OPINION IS WITH THEM.

5. IT IS CRITICALLY IMPORTANT THAT THE WEEKEND'Y EVENTS HAPPENED IN LAHORE RATHER THAN ELSEWHERE. PAKISTANI AND DIPLOMATIC OBSERVERS NOTE THAT THE LEVEL AND INTENSITY OF VIOLENCE IN LAHORE ON SATURDAY WAS FAR IN EXCESS OF THAT SEEN DURING THE ANTI-AYUB DEMONSTRATIONS IN LAHORE OF 1968-69. UNTIL NOW, THE MOST INTENSE OPPOSITION ACTIVITY HAS BEEN IN THE SIND AND LAHORE HAS BEEN RELATIVELY QUIET. THE OPPOSITION RECOGNIZED THAT IF THE MOVEMENT HAD ANY CHANCE OF SUCCEEDING, IT MUST CARRY LAHORE AND THE PUNJAB WITH IT. AS NOTED IN REFTELS, DEMONSTRATIONS AND MARCHES IN LAHORE ARE FEEDING OPPOSITION ACTIVITIES IN OTHER CITIES IN THE PUNJAB AND VICE-VERSA. BHUTTO'S WORRIES HAVE UNDOUBTEDLY INCREASED BECAUSE KARACHI AND HYDERABAD ARE HEATING UP AGAIN AS WELL, IN REACTION TO EVENTS IN THE PUNJAB. CONGEN KARACHI REPORTS THAT A WALK-OUT CALLED FOR TODAY TO PROTEST THE KILLINGS IN LAHORE HAS BEEN GENERALLY SUCCESSFUL.

6. THE PROSPECT IS FOR A HIGHER LEVEL OF CONFRONTATION IN THE NEXT SEVERAL WEEKS. THE SITUATION IS VOLATILE AND THE GOVERNMENT COULD FIND ITSELF NOT BEING ABLE TO MAINTAIN LAW AND ORDER BY USING CIVIL FORCES ONLY. THE ARMY DID NOT GET INVOLVED IN ACTIVELY SUPPORTING THE POLICE AND FEDERAL SECURITY FORCE IN LAHORE OVER THE WEEKEND. (WE UNDERSTAND IT IS STILL AIDING THE CIVIL FORCES IN MULTAN, HOWEVER.) THE ARMY CHIEF OF STAFF GENERAL ZIA-UL-HAQ WENT TO LAHORE ON SUNDAY TO PERSONALLY REVIEW THE SECURITY SITUATION.

7. THE ARMY CONTINUES TO BE THE KEY ELEMENT TO WATCH. MANY POLITICAL OBSERVERS BELIEVE THAT IF THE GOVERNMENT HAS TO CALL IN THE ARMY TO CONTROL THE SITUATION IN LAHORE, IT COULD WELL HERALD THE BEGINNING OF THE END FOR BHUTTO - JUST AS CONFIDENTIAL

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HAPPENED WITH AYUB WHEN THE MILITARY ASSUMED LAW AND ORDER RESPONSIBILITIES IN LAHORE IN 1968 THE TWO OTHER IMPORTANT ELEMENTS TO WATCH ARE STUDENTS AND LABOR. IN 1968-69 THEY PLAYED A MAJOR ROLE IN AYUB'S DOWNFALL. THEY HAVE BEEN GENERALLY USEFUL IN THE CURRENT CONFRONTATION. WE UNDERSTAND, HOWEVER, THAT TODAY'S HARTAL IN KARACHI WAS ORGANIZED BY A LOOSE COALITION OF STUDENT GROUPS, AND AN ACTIVIST STUDENTS GROUP HAS SAID IT WILL BEGIN DEMONSTRATING IN PESHAWAR TO PROTEST THE CONTINUING CLOSURE OF SCHOOLS. CONGEN LAHORE HAS NOTED REPORTS OF SOME LABOR PRESENCE IN THE DEMONSTRATIONS ON SATURDAY. IF BOTH THESE GROUPS DECIDE TO TAKE UP THE CUDGELS ON BEHALF OF THE PNA, IT WILL PUT BHUTTO IN A PRECARIOUS POSITION. WE HAVE HAD NO CONCLUSIVE EVIDENCE YET, HOWEVER, THAT EITHER STUDENTS OR LABOR HAS DECIDED TO STOP FENCE-SITTING AND THROW IN ITS LOT WITH THE PNA.

8. THE PRIME MINISTER'S POSITION HAS OBVIOUSLY BEEN WEAKENED BY EVENTS THE PAST TWO DAYS. WE EXPECT THE AGITATION WILL CONTINUE AND THAT THE OPPOSITION MOVEMENT WILL BE INFUSED WITH NEW VIGOR AND CONFIDENCE. IT WILL BECOME MUCH MORE DIFFICULT TO SUPPRESS BY FORCE AND IT IS LESS LIKELY IT WILL DIE OUT IN THE NEXT SEVERAL WEEKS BECAUSE OF ECONOMIC HARDSHIPS OR BOREDOM. ARRESTS OF THE LEADING PNA FIGURES AND ACTIVISTS HAS NOT HAD A NOTICEABLE IMPACT ON THE MOVEMENT. SOME OBSERVERS BELIEVE THE AGITATION CONTINUES BASICALLY WITHOUT CENTRAL DIRECTION IN THE SMALLER CITIES AND TOWNS IN THE PUNJAB COUNTRYSIDE. IF SO, IT WILL BE THAT MUCH MORE DIFFICULT FOR THE GOVERNMENT TO CONTAIN AND EVENTUALLY SUBDUCE IT.

9. IT IS CERTAINLY TOO SOON TO CONSIGN BHUTTO TO THE PAKISTAN POLITICAL GRAVEYARD. THE WEEKEND'S HAPPENINGS DO NOT EVEN MEAN HE HAS BEGUN AN INEXORABLE SLIDE TOWARD POLITICAL OBLIVION. HE STILL HAS CONSIDERABLE AND OBVIOUS RESOURCES ON WHICH HE CAN DRAW. THE CIVIL ADMINISTRATION AND POLICE REMAIN LOYAL. THE ARMY IS HELPING MAINTAIN LAW AND ORDER AND ITS TOP LEADERSHIP CONTINUES TO BACK THE PM. THE GOVERNMENT OWNED

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MEDIA REMAINS SLAVISH IN ITS PRAISE OF THE PM - ALTHOUGH WE CONTINUE TO SEE A SURPRISING DEGREE OF OUTSPOKENNESS AND OBJECTIVE REPORTING IN THE NON-PRESS TRUST NEWSPAPERS. HOWEVER, BHUTTO FACES THE IRONY THAT ALL THESE RESOURCES ARE MOST SUPPORTIVE WHEN HE DOES NOT HAVE TO CONTINUALLY CALL UPON THEM. THE MORE THESE ARE USED AND THE MORE THE PM'S DEPENDENCY BECOMES EVIDENT, THE LESS WILLING THE INSTITUTIONS WILL BE TO PROTECT HIM INDEFINITELY. NO ONE CAN PREDICT THE OUTCOME OF THE CONFRONTATION. AFTER THIS WEEKEND'S EVENTS, HOWEVER, FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE MARCH 7, TIME MAY BE RUNNING AGAINST THE PM RATHER THAN IN HIS FAVOR.

BY ROADE UNQTE VANCE

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 22-Sep-1999 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: CIVIL DISORDERS, OPPOSITION PARTIES, POLITICAL CONCESSIONS, POLITICAL STABILITY, PROVINCE
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Copy: SINGLE
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Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977STATE080623
Document Source: ADS
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: S/S- O RPERITO
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: 11652 GDS
Errors: n/a
Expiration:
Film Number: D770125-0832
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Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t197704103/baaaevrd.tel
Line Count: 219
Litigation Code IDs:
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Office: ORIGIN SS
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators:
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: LAHORE 335 (NOTAL), LAHORE 336 (NOTAL)
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 10-Nov-2004 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 2668554
Secure: OPEN
Status: <DBA CORRECTED> mcm 970829
Subject: PRESSURES ON BHUTTO MOUNT
TAGS: PGOV, PK, PINT
To: ALGIERS
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/42253e9c-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009